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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was threefold. It attempted to develop an attitude scale to measure prejudice in elementary school-aged children. It then compared these children's self perceptions with the perceptions of members of other race-sex groups using the Scale of Children's Attitudes toward Race and Gender. In addition, it investigated differential teacher/student interactions as a potential source of influence on children's attitudes. Approximately 250 third and fourth grade students participated in the study. Modifications made to the Scale of Children's Attitudes toward Race and Gender were found to have satisfactory psychometric properties. Analyses of the children's attitude data support an interaction effect between race and sex with regard to children's prejudice. The study did not support a link between teacher differential treatment of and children's attitudes toward out-groups. Several possibilities are given for the results. (Contains 23 references.) (JDM)

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Running head: CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD RACE AND GENDER

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Children's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender

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Children's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender

Recent literature looking at the development of prejudice in children has focused in part on both race and sex biases (Fishbein, 1996). An implicit assumption in the majority of this research is that race prejudice and sex prejudice are equivalent across groups; that is, sex bias is not conditional on race and race bias is not conditional on sex of the target child. However, the discrimination literature examining bias in four main race-sex groups (Black girls, Black boys, White girls, White boys) has shown that simply considering race and sex independently of one another may obscure the true picture.

For example, Fishbein and Imai's (1993) playground and classroom observations of preschool children revealed an overall same-sex peer preference. However, a race-sex interaction was also found; girls preferred same race girls and least preferred White boys. Boys on the other hand, preferred White boys, but did show a same race preference when it came to girls. Singleton and Asher (1977) observed third grade children's interactions in their classrooms. They found the usual strong same sex preferences, but that girls showed a same race preference that was absent for the boys. These studies demonstrate nicely the interactive nature of race and sex when it comes to children's behavioral peer preference choices. While research shows that discrimination and prejudice are not equivalent phenomena, the question remains: does children's prejudice depend on both the race and sex of the target?

With that question in mind, the purpose of this study was threefold. First, we attempted to develop an attitude scale measuring prejudice in elementary school-aged children. We chose this age group in particular because development of racial attitudes is believed to level off between eight and 12 years of age (Aboud, 1988; Williams & Morland, 1976); therefore, an instrument measuring this age group's attitudes is particularly important to understanding the development of prejudice. The Scale of Children's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender was a four point Likert scale that attempted to elicit children's attitudes toward the above four groups of children. Items focused on both academic and classroom behavioral skills, and social distance preferences.

These particular foci were chosen because they are highly relevant to the school environment, which is the most salient and pervasive extra-familial social aspect common to children's lives, and also one of the main environments in which children's social behaviors and attitudes toward out-groups have been studied. In what sense are these attitudes prejudice? Prejudice has been characterized as having three essential dimensions: cognitive (i.e. beliefs), affect, and behavioral predispositions (Ehrlich, 1973). Paralleling this definition, our initial choice of the academic and classroom behavioral skills factors was meant to capture the cognitive, or belief, dimension of prejudice, while the social distance factor was meant to reflect the behavioral dimension (Fishbein, 1996).

The Scale of Children's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender is a unique instrument in that it examines attitudes toward race and gender simultaneously. In order to do this, we created four subscales in which each race-sex group (Black girls, White girls, Black boys, White boys) served as target for a set of otherwise identical items. As a result, we had to determine that each subscale was being responded to similarly and thus presumably measuring the same phenomenon, regardless of target group. The statistical concept is called invariance; it is commonly an important matter of question for researchers trying to determine that their instrument carries the same meaning to participants after it has been translated into another language (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Our goal was to develop a set of items that taps into the same factors for each race-sex group to thus measure children's attitudes toward these groups equivalently.

In addition, the scale is paper and pencil based and can be group-administered to children of elementary school age. This group was chosen because, as previously mentioned, racial attitudes are believed to stabilize between eight and 12 years of age (Aboud, 1988; Williams & Morland, 1976) and, more specifically, because they are generally the oldest public school children to remain in the classroom with the same teacher for the whole day. Other measures of children's attitudes toward out-groups such as the PRAM II, or Preschool Racial Attitude Measure, (Williams & Morland, 1976) and MRA, or Multi-response Racial Attitudes, measure (Doyle & Aboud, 1995) focus solely on race and are picture/doll based, and thus not conducive to group administration.

The second purpose of this study was to compare children's self-perceptions with their perceptions of members of other race-sex groups, using the Scale of Children's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender. To the extent that prejudice and discrimination are related, one might expect that patterns similar to those found in the discrimination literature would arise in studies examining prejudiced attitudes. As noted earlier, strong same sex preferences are found as early as the preschool years and to hold steady through the elementary and middle school years. Race preferences depended on both race and sex of the rater in preschool children (Fishbein & Imai, 1993), while third grade girls, but not boys, showed a same race preference (Singleton & Asher, 1977). Findings similar to those of the third graders were reported for seventh and eighth grade adolescents (Schofield & Sagar, 1977). In light of the results of studies such as that by Singleton and Asher, who studied third grade children, we predicted that this study would reveal race-sex interactions as well. More specifically, we expected girls to show a preference for children of their own race and sex, with same race boys as their second choice, and that boys would prefer same sex peers, but not necessarily same race.

The third purpose of this study was to investigate differential teacher/student interactions as a potential source of influence on children's attitudes. While much research has been conducted in an effort to link children's prejudiced attitudes to

those of their parents (Aboud, 1988; Fishbein, 1996) and recent research has examined peer influences (Aboud & Doyle, 1996; Ritchey & Fishbein, 2001), the data support modest parental but no peer influences. Given the large amount of time children spend in school, it is thought that teachers, as social agents, may have a substantial impact on their social development. This is particularly true in the elementary school years, when children are learning where and how they fit into their initial social circles (Alexander, Entwisle & Thompson, 1987). The research literature examining the effect of teacher expectations on student performance and self-perception serves as strong support for the role of teacher influences (Brattesani, Weinstein & Marshall, 1984; Epstein, 1985; Good, 1982); this phenomenon has been coined the Pygmalian effect (Rosenthal & Jabcobson; 1968). The diversity literature tells a similar story; for example, Sheets (1999) reports that students whose teachers systematically promoted appreciation for diversity and ethnic identity development showed higher levels of academic and social competence.

Related to the above, Sadker and Sadker (1994) investigated differential teacher behavior by observing teachers and students in elementary school classrooms, recording specific aspects of each interaction. They observed that boys as a group received a disproportionately large amount of teacher attention, both positive and negative, and that girls, especially African American (the researchers looked mainly at gender differences, and only secondarily at race), were virtually invisible. Using the Sadkers' observation system, the present study attempted to systematically observe and record teacher-student interactions. Once again, we intended to begin exploring the relationship between differential teacher behavior and children's attitudes toward their own and other race-sex groups. In order to do this, we maximized the relevance of the Scale of Children's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender to the classroom environment by choosing item content that would assess beliefs about social and academic skills and classroom behaviors.

Assuming we would find patterns similar to the Sadkers' (1994) and that teacher differential treatment of race-sex groups does influence children's attitudes, as noted above, we expect to find that boys would be rated more favorably by their peers than girls, with Black girls being rated least favorably. Because the Sadkers did not look specifically at the four race-sex groups, we had no predictions based on race or race-sex statistical interactions.

Method

Participants

Approximately 250 third and fourth grade children were observed in their 11 classrooms on four separate occasions. White female teachers taught nine of these 11 classrooms; the remaining two were taught by a White male and a Black female, respectively. The children came from three schools in a district with a median family income of $23,617. Teachers sent home

parental consent forms to participate in the attitude scale administration multiple occasions; the final consent rate was approximately 50%, with 125 children participating in the scale administration.

The children ranged in age from 7 to 11 years, with a median age of 9. Sixty-two children were female and 63 were male; 63 were non-White (56 identified as Black, the rest as "other"), and 62 were White. As the schools' populations were mixed approximately evenly between boys and girls, and Blacks and Whites, it appears that the rate of consent return was evenly distributed across the race-sex groups. For purposes of statistical analysis, the data from the classification of "other" were eliminated, as the number of "other" race children was too small for statistical comparison.

Scale of Children's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender

Forty-eight original items for the scale were written in an attempt to tap into beliefs about Black girls, White girls, Black boys and White boys' academic and athletic abilities, social distance desirabilities, and classroom behaviors. After a confirmatory factor analysis and an attempt to establish sub-scale invariance, 24 items remained. These items loaded onto two factors (see Table1), which we have called Classroom Skills (16 items total, four per race-sex group) and Social Distance (eight items total, two per race-sex group. The Classroom Skills factor is interpreted to be a measure of a combination of social and academic skills that are especially relevant to the classroom environment. The Social Distance factor is a measure of the degree of comfort (or lack thereof) children have in interacting with out-group members, as judged by degree of "social distance" inherent in each interaction (working in groups at school versus eating dinner with).

The Intersect Observation System

Classroom interactions were recorded using the Intersect Observation System, as described in Sadker and Sadker's (1984) Promoting Effectiveness in Classroom Instruction. This system allows observers to record each teacher/student interaction, including the gender and race of the student, who initiated the interaction and how, what type or quality of feedback the teacher gave the child [praise, remediation (comments including a constructive way to improve the response), acceptance (comments such as "okay" without explicitly indicating if the answer was right or wrong) or criticism] and what its content was (intellectual, conduct, appearance of student or their work, or other).

Procedure

Each classroom was observed for a period of 30 minutes on four separate occasions. To the extent possible, each classroom's observations were scheduled at varying times of day. The observations were executed first to afford the children an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the researchers' presence before their attitude scale administration. Two White female observers recorded teacher/student interactions, noting race and sex of the child, who initiated the interaction

Table 1: Items for Respective Four Race-Sex Targets By Factor

Factor 1: Classroom Skills

1). White girls (BB, BG, WB) are not good classroom leaders.

2). Black girls (BB, WG, WB) misbehave more often than other kids.

3). It is harder to get along with Black boys (WG, BG, WB) than other kids.

4). White boys (BB, BG, WG) do not give good answers in class as often as other kids.

Factor 2: Social Distance

5). I like doing schoolwork in groups that include White girls (BG, BB, WB).

6). I would like to eat dinner with a Black girl (WG, BB, WB) and her (his) family.

(teacher or student), how it was initiated (teacher called on the student, student raised hand, called out, or physically approached the teacher), and the content and quality of the interaction (intellect, conduct, other; praise, acceptance, remediation, criticism).

The attitude scale was administered to the children in their classrooms or the school library. The teachers were not present during administration, as they attended to the non-participating children. The directions and items were read aloud to the group and repeated as necessary. The children were directed to keep their eyes on their own papers and refrain from making comments in order to afford each other privacy to answer honestly. The researcher answered questions about the items and purpose of the scale at the end of administration.

Data Analysis

With regard to the attitude scale, we examined the invariance across groups of the item variances and means, the unstandardized factor loadings (metric invariance), the intercepts associated with the factor loadings (scalar invariance), the item error terms, the standardized loadings, the factor variances, the factor covariances, and the differences in means among factors (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). We performed these confirmatory factor analyses in an attempt to determine that the parallel items were measuring the same phenomena, regardless of target group (White girls, Black girls, White boys, Black boys). We then formed the two scales for each target group by summing the item scores and dividing by the number of items in the factor.

Using repeated measures ANOVA, we tested whether the groups rated themselves and the other race-sex groups the same or differently on each factor.

Upon pooling the observations across classrooms, we performed various crosstabulations. We calculated frequency of content (intellectual or conduct) and quality (praise, acceptance, remediation, or criticism) of interactions per race-sex group. In addition, we calculated crosstabulations to compare frequency of interactions recorded by observers, to test inter-rater reliability. We used the Chi square statistic to test for significant differences.

Results and Discussion

Scale Invariance

With regard to the instrument, we found that the psychometric properties corroborated our view that the items reflect the same two dimensions of prejudice independent of the target group to which the items refer. Thus, we can confidently measure the two factors with the same items regardless of target group.

Classroom Observations

With regard to inter-observer agreement, Chi square tests revealed a significant difference between observers;

however, it was solely in the number of observations overall, as one observer recorded 50% more interactions than the other. More importantly, proportions within each observer's total observations for each race-sex group were essentially equivalent.

With regard to teacher/student interactions, our findings support those of Sadker and Sadker (1994), in that girls were found to receive the least amount of attention from teachers and boys the most. Including race in the equation paints a more complex picture (see Table 2). We found that, overall, White girls participated in the least number of teacher-student interactions (17.5%) and Black boys by far the most (36.3%). Black girls and White boys had essentially equivalent percentages. A Chi square test showed the relationship to be significant at the $p < .001$ level.

When examining quality of teacher interaction, we found the average distribution of interaction across all children was 7.6% praise, 46.7% acceptance, 42.7% remediation, and 3.5% criticism. Teachers made criticizing and remediating comments, the two more negative interaction qualities, primarily with regard to classroom conduct. Praise and acceptance, on the other hand, were directed primarily toward academic performance. As the most notable differences across race-sex groups were in the praise and criticism categories, we will focus primarily on those when making comparisons.

As Black boys received 36.3% and White girls 17.5% of the overall number of interactions, we would expect them to receive equal proportions of praise and criticism if there were no differences in teacher behavior toward the race-sex groups (i.e. Black boys would receive 36.6% and White girls 17.5% of each, overall). Between groups, however, we found that Black boys received a disproportionately small (27.9%) and White girls a disproportionately large (24.2%) amount of teacher praise relative to their overall rates of participation. Conversely, we found that Black boys received a disproportionately large (60.5%) and Black girls, White boys (both 15.8%), and particularly White girls (7.9%), disproportionately small amounts of teacher criticism. A Chi square test showed the relationship to be significant at $p < .001$ level. It should be noted that teachers' behavior will be at least partially contingent on the behavior of the students, and vise versa. For example, it is likely that the attention Black boys receive is partially elicited by their own behavior, and not solely due to teacher preferences.

Furthermore, while acceptance and remediation were the most common teacher response overall, White girls (again, relative to their overall rates of participation) received a slightly smaller amount of remediation (13.3%) and a slightly larger amount of acceptance (20.8%). Conversely, Black boys received a slightly larger amount of remediation (40.8%) and a slightly smaller amount of acceptance (31.8%). A Chi square test showed this relationship to be significant at $p < .001$ level. This parallels Sadker and Sadker's (1994) finding that girls receive high levels of acceptance relative to boys' high levels of remediation, although the current study found this only for Black and not White boys.

Table 2: Teacher/Student Interactions by Quality/Content of Teacher Response and Race-sex of Child**

			Black girls	White girls	Black boys	White boys
		Overall	***22.3***	***17.5***	***36.3***	***23.9***
Quality	***Praise***	***7.6***	24.8	24.2	27.9	23.0
	Acceptance	***46.7***	22.1	20.8	31.8	25.2
	Remediation	***42.1***	22.6	13.3	40.8	23.3
	Criticism	***3.5***	15.8	7.9	60.5	15.8
Content	***Intellect***	***29.1***	23.0	20.7	30.8	25.6
	Conduct	***68.2***	20.8	10.0	49.0	20.2

**values are percentages by row

When considering content of teacher/student interaction, i.e. whether the teacher is commenting on conduct or intellect, similar patterns arise. Again, if there were no differences in teacher behavior, we would expect Black boys to receive 36.3% and White girls 17.5% of the overall number of interactions related to conduct or intellect. Black boys participated in a disproportionately large number of interactions regarding their conduct (49%), and a disproportionately small number regarding their intellect (30.8%). White girls, on the other hand, received an average amount of feedback on their intellect, but a disproportionately small amount of feedback on their conduct (10%). Black girls and White boys again were average. A Chi square test showed this relationship to be significant at $p < .001$ level.

Unfortunately, the nature of the classroom observations was such that they did not lend information relative to predictions about the Social Distance factor. However, the significantly different patterns of teacher/student interactions across race-sex groups, which focused primarily on students' classroom skills, do speak to predictions for the second factor. Assuming the role of teachers as socializing agents, we might expect the children to view White girls most favorably with regard to their Classroom Skills, and Black boys least favorably. Such a finding would lend support for a relationship between teacher's differential treatment of race-sex groups and children's differential attitudes toward those groups, and thus implicate the role of teachers as influential in the development of children's attitudes.

Children's Attitudes

Examination of marginal means for Classroom Skills, with race-sex groups as both targets and raters, indicated that there were no significant within or between subjects main effects, i.e. the groups were not ranked differently overall, and did not rank each other differently overall (see table 3). This finding does not support our prediction that teachers influence children's attitudes. Although we found significantly different positive and negative treatment of the four race-sex groups by teachers, this was not reflected in the children's attitudes toward those groups. Quite to the contrary, we found that the four race-sex groups' attitudes toward themselves and each other were consistently positive. Results of the Classroom Skills ANOVA revealed a significant interaction ($p < .001$). Group means indicated that each group rated itself most favorably, with same race members as second highest (e.g., Black boys ranked Black girls second most positively). For all groups except Black boys (who ranked White boys least positively), the opposite race-sex group was ranked least positively.

For Social Distance (see Table 4), the ANOVA revealed a significant interaction ($p < .001$). We found again that each group ranked itself most favorably and the opposite race-sex group least favorably, this time without exception. However, unlike Classroom Skills, the children ranked as their second highest choice same sex groups, as opposed to same race groups, with the exception of Black girls who ranked White girls and Black boys as second highest.

Table 3: Classroom Skills Means for Race-sex Groups as Raters (rows) and Targets (columns)**

			TARGET			
		Black Girls	**White Girls**	**Black Boys**	**White Boys**	**means**
	Black Girls	3.32	3.19	3.25	3.07	3.21
RATER	**White Girls**	3.10	3.57	3.07	3.37	3.28
	Black Boys	3.33	3.07	3.57	2.99	3.24
	White Boys	2.91	3.24	3.06	3.60	3.20
	Means	3.17	3.27	3.24	3.25	

Interaction: $p < .001$
**on a scale of 1-4

Table 4: Social Distance Means for Race-sex Groups as Raters (rows) and Targets (columns)**

			TARGET			
		Black Girls	**White Girls**	**Black Boys**	**White Boys**	**means**
	Black Girls	3.43	2.78	2.78	2.45	2.86
RATER	**White Girls**	2.62	3.21	2.24	2.44	2.63
	Black Boys	3.27	2.14	3.42	2.27	2.78
	White Boys	2.05	2.52	2.71	2.85	2.53
	means	2.86	2.66	2.79	2.49	

Interaction: $p < .001$
**on a scale of 1-4

These results indicate that examining the role of race and sex in children's prejudice separately may be misleading. Considering race and sex simultaneously demonstrated that they interact in such a way that the experience and perceptions of each race-sex group will be qualitatively different from that of the other race-sex groups. Researchers studying prejudice using the PRAM and MRA have found a generalized same sex bias for both Black and White children, a same race bias for White children, and for Black children, either neutral attitudes or a bias in favor of White children (Aboud, 1988; Williams & Morland, 1976; Fishbein, 1996). These results are clearly dissimilar to ours, likely because these studies did not test for a race-sex interaction.

The discrimination literature, in which race-sex interactions were tested, reports an overall same sex peer preference, and a race preference that depended on the race-sex group. Our prediction that girls would show a preference for children of their own race and sex, with same race boys as their second choice, and that boys would prefer same sex peers, but not necessarily same race, was only partially fulfilled. While we did find a clear overall same race-sex preference for both scale factors, in that all four race-sex groups rated themselves highest and opposite race-sex groups lowest, second choices depended on the factor. Classroom Skills showed a same race preference for second choice. For Social Distance, however, we found that the second choice was based on a same sex preference. The latter finding was partially similar to the Singleton and Asher (1977) results of strong same sex preferences, and a same race preference for girls. The rest of our results were dissimilar. These differences may be attributable to the fact that Singleton and Asher used a different measuring system, in that they observed children's behavior, while we administered an attitude scale. Furthermore, the Singleton and Asher study took place nearly 25 years ago, a time much closer to desegregation; therefore, the cohort effect may be playing a role in these differences. In spite of specific differences in findings, however, the overall pattern of results seems to indicate that the inclusion of both race and sex in the analyses lends a different, more complex picture of children's attitudes toward out-groups than looking at either singularly.

By looking at race and sex simultaneously, this study further found that the respective strengths of race and sex preferences depend on which aspect of prejudice one is considering, as demonstrated by the two factors of Children's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender, Social Distance and Classroom Skills. This disparity in attitudinal patterns indicates that same sex preferences are stronger than same race when it comes to varying degrees of social interactions, while same race preferences prevail when it comes to ability and skill. It seems, therefore, that the current study illustrates not only a unique approach to studying prejudice in children, but also an invaluable approach in that it may provide a more complete perspective on race and sex prejudice.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the relatively low rate of participation in scale administration. While 250 children were observed and eligible for participation, only half of that number returned parental consent forms. This may have been due to lack of teachers' support of our presence, and/or possibly because of the nature of the study. Teacher feedback told us that some parents were uncomfortable with the notion of encouraging their children to evaluate each other; the presence of this concern in the non-participating children's parents and its absence in participating children's parents may be a source of difference between the two groups of children.

A second limitation of this study related to the inter-observer reliability. While proportions within each observer's total observations for each race-sex group were essentially equivalent, a Chi square test revealed a significant difference between the number of observations overall, as one observer recorded 50% more interactions than the other. Although it seems most important that observers recorded equal proportions of interactions per race-sex group, the fact that one recorded significantly more than the other may limit generalizability of results.

A third limitation of this study concerned the scale. Although the final scale had satisfactory properties with regard to invariance, it required major modification of the original 48 item/3 factor version to reach the final 24 item/2 factor version. The small number of items per factor (four for Classroom Skills and two for Social Distance) is a definite weakness. Another weakness was our failure to establish our third original factor, Academic Skills. Our original intent was to have, in addition to the Social Distance factor, two separate skills factors: one related to academic abilities and the other to social skills in the school environment. Instead, analyses showed only one factor, which became Classroom Skills, a combination of academic and social skills.

Conclusions

Our modified version of the Scale of Children's Attitudes Toward Race and Gender was found to have satisfactory psychometric properties. Scales of this type are greatly needed in the literature, as there is a lack of instruments for elementary school aged children that are paper and pencil based and thus appropriate for group administration in the classroom. As mentioned previously, this age is thought to be the time period during which children's attitudes toward out-groups stabilize; therefore, an understanding of the development of prejudice will rely heavily on instruments conducive to studying children of this age.

The results of our analyses of the children's attitude data support an interaction effect between race and sex with regard to children's prejudice. This finding is key to future research. The current study clearly demonstrates the need to

measure attitudes about race and sex simultaneously, as measuring them separately renders only a simplified version of a very complex story.

Surprisingly, while it seems quite clear that Black and White boys and girls are treated quite differently by teachers, this is not reflected in the children's self-reported attitudes toward these groups, as measured by our scale. Instead, as previously mentioned, the children's attitudes toward each other were overwhelmingly positive, and therefore not indicative of a relationship between teacher differential treatment of race-sex groups and children's prejudice. While it seems there is much support for teachers influencing other areas of their students' development, this study does not support a link between teacher differential treatment of and children's attitudes toward out-groups. This may possibly be due to the fact that the areas found to be influenced by teachers, such as self-esteem and achievement, are related to attitudes toward the self. Perhaps the external focus of attitudes-toward-others is the difference, in that children may be more influenced by teacher behavior that is directly related to themselves than behavior related to others, a type of self-reference effect. This may account for why parents and peers have little influence on children's attitudes toward out-groups as well.

Whatever the reason for the disparities, our findings and the findings of other studies looking at influences of children's attitudes speak to the complexity of gender and race socialization. No matter how complex, however, we feel that future research exploring this avenue while considering race and sex simultaneously would be of great benefit. Potential isolation of a link in the chain of the socialization of prejudice would afford a greatly needed focus for change, and a subsequent direction to follow.

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